

Drawing Connections and Engaging in Conversations That Help Us Compose Our Lives

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First fifteen minutes: Drawing Neighborhood Maps

Directions: Provide participants with construction paper and crayons and invite them to draw a map, in any fashion that suits them, of the earliest neighborhood of which they have vivid memories. If they moved around, they should choose just one of their neighborhoods to represent, and it should be a place where they lived while under the age of 10.

Next twenty minutes: Storytelling from Maps

Directions: Invite participants to form pairs and share their maps with one another (each taking ten minutes). They should tell stories about their lives, families, friends and neighborhood that come to mind as they look at the map.

Next thirty minutes: Composing Our Lives

Directions: Participants write about their lives in this neighborhood. The story might be of a "once"—one incident that stands out, or about a character from their childhood. They might write essays about life in that era in that town/neighborhood. Each writer will choose the way to respond that feels most appropriate.

The next hour: Sharing

(We will do the remainder of these activities on the first day of the Invitational Institute)

Directions: Writers will share their stories with their writing groups and will either select one story from the group to share in its entirety with the whole group or select passages from each of their pieces for a read around with the whole group.

Another Thirty Minutes: Reflecting on Our Stories

Directions: Individuals use the reflection questions to prompt their thinking and writing about their writing. The first fifteen minutes are spent drafting these individual reflections, the last fifteen minutes are spent in group sharing.

Finally, the Last Thirty Minutes: De-briefing the Composing Our Lives Experience

Directions: Individuals and then group reflect on what they have learned and how they might use this activity in their classrooms. They attempt to distill the tenets of "best practice" in composition theory that are suggested by this writing experience.

¹ This idea for this presentation grew from a presentation originally developed by my good friend and colleague Pat Fox, Director of the Coastal Georgia Writing Project in Savannah.